

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN SENATE
Prefiled Resolution

RS.15.04 Resolution on Shared Governance and Academic Freedom

BACKGROUND

This summer, senior administrators decided to recommend that the Board of Trustees not approve the appointment of Dr. Steven Salaita to a tenured position in American Indian Studies on our campus, after such an appointment had been recommended through a thorough and appropriate academic review of Dr. Salaita's credentials by that unit, by the college level promotion and tenure committee, and by the campus promotion and tenure committee. This decision, together with the public statements from the administration in the wake of this decision, has led to an unfortunate division on our campus.

Some faculty and students have made impassioned arguments that this decision represents a direct affront to both academic freedom and shared governance, and the faculties of more than a dozen units reacted by passing no-confidence motions. Other faculty and students have made public statements in support of the Chancellor, and some departments have voted on formal statements expressing support, or even unequivocal support, for the Chancellor.

Despite differences in opinion about the decision, there is no question that the decision has had adverse impacts on many departments and has the potential to have adverse impacts on the campus as a whole. Scholarly associations in many disciplines have issued statements critical of the university, and over 5000 academics outside of our campus have expressed their disapproval by boycotting our campus. Many talks and conferences, including the entire year's colloquium series in Philosophy, have been canceled as outside speakers have withdrawn. Some departmental program reviews and senior faculty searches have had to be postponed. Scholars across campus are concerned that the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) may censure the university, which would have impacts across campus.

Broadly speaking, the concerns about the handling of the Salaita case fall into two categories. The first involves procedural concerns surrounding the fact that Salaita's proposed appointment, which had been vetted at all appropriate levels, was summarily "aborted" without consultation of either the college-level administration or members of the relevant home unit. These concerns appear to be broadly shared across campus, and an *ad hoc* task force has been constituted by the Senate Executive Committee to recommend procedural changes. The second category involves concerns about the precedent of the Salaita decision, and the subsequent massmails sent by the administration, in the context of academic freedom. There is a wider range of concerns in this category among scholars on our campus, and these issues are currently being explored by the Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure.

We may respectfully disagree with one another about whether the non-appointment of Dr. Salaita was justifiable or a grave injustice, and whether the Chancellor's actions represent an unfortunate blemish on an otherwise outstanding record or clear evidence that she is unfit to lead an institution of higher learning. These disagreements, which have been heated in recent months, can obscure the fact that there is a great deal of common ground shared by students, academic professionals, and faculty across our campus. This resolution is intended to express our united voice in honoring the bedrock principles of shared governance and academic freedom that we all cherish.

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS Dr. Steven Salaita was recommended for a tenured faculty position on our campus following a thorough and appropriate review of his case by disciplinary experts at the unit level, by a college promotion and tenure committee, and by the campus promotion and tenure committee, and

WHEREAS the Chancellor initially declined to forward this recommendation to the Board of Trustees and subsequently recommended that the Board of Trustees not approve it, following a series of Twitter messages from Dr. Salaita on a topic related to the subject of his scholarly work that many observers considered to lack appropriate civility, and

WHEREAS the Chancellor has acknowledged that these decisions were made without consulting either college-level administrators or members of the relevant home unit, and

WHEREAS the Chancellor justified her decision in a massmail to campus that stated in part "What we cannot and will not tolerate at the University of Illinois are personal and disrespectful words or actions that demean and abuse either viewpoints themselves or those who express them," and

WHEREAS the Board of Trustees and President Easter followed this with a massmail that included the phrase "we must constantly reinforce our expectation of a university community that values civility as much as scholarship,"

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the process by which the decisions were made first not to forward the recommended appointment of Dr. Salaita to the Board of Trustees and then to recommend against it was inconsistent with the principles of shared governance and academic decision-making that are cherished by our campus and enshrined in our *Statutes*, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Senate expects senior administration officials to respect the academic processes by which recommendations for hiring, promotion, and tenure are made, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT decisions by senior administrators to act in opposition to recommendations for hiring, promotion, and tenure that arise through appropriate academic processes should occur only, if ever, following extensive consultation with all academic units that would be impacted by such decisions, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Senate affirms its commitment to the policy statements on academic freedom and shared governance made by the American Association of University Professors, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Senate, while embracing the AAUP's admonition that university teachers have a special obligation to be accurate at all times, to exercise appropriate restraint, and to show respect for the opinions of others, rejects as unacceptably broad the claim that the University of Illinois "cannot and will not tolerate...disrespectful words or actions that demean or abuse either viewpoints themselves or those who express them," and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED THAT the Senate, while recognizing civility as a laudable norm for public discourse, rejects the notion that a university should value "civility as much as scholarship," since the free expression of scholarly opinions is the essence of academic freedom, even in cases where such expression might be viewed by some as lacking civility.

Respectfully submitted and co-sponsored by:

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